

ON THE RACES OF *LYBIUS LEUCOMELAS* (BODD.)  
IN SOUTH AFRICA

By

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Six races of the Barbet *Lybius leucomelas* are recognized by Roberts (1940) and Vincent (1952) from within South African limits. The races are the same in both, though Roberts refers to his own *zuluensis* as *tongensis* in his book, as he does also in his description of *L. l. centralis*. Thanks to the co-operation of the Director and Mrs. Campbell of the Transvaal Museum and the Directors of the East London and Durban Museums and the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, a series of 110 specimens was assembled for study; and I subsequently also examined a series of 28 of the specimens in the British Museum (Natural History) on which Macdonald (1957) based his findings.

My original purpose in investigating the races of this species was to check the validity and the range, if valid, of *L. l. namaqua* (W. L. Sclater), and I shall deal with this race first.

The sole distinction given by Sclater between *namaqua* and *leucomelas* is that the former has 'the underparts thickly spotted with oval spots of black'. The type locality of *leucomelas* is given as the Cape of Good Hope; that of *namaqua* is Klipfontein. I found that most birds, though not quite all, in a coastal strip from Namaqualand to Albany, were heavily spotted. Birds from Committee's Drift, Albany and Mostertshoek, Tarkastad, varied, some being heavily spotted, others not. Clancey (1954) had already drawn attention to this and Macdonald (1957) also noted it. One of two birds from Clanwilliam was virtually unspotted and so was the only available specimen from Hopefield. But birds from Klaver, Cape L'Agulhas, Stilbaai and another Clanwilliam bird were all spotted. I noted also that one of the two British Museum birds from Klipfontein, the type locality of *namaqua*, was a lightly spotted form. Unless, therefore, there is an unspotted form confined to the area west of the Hottentots Holland Mountains and south of the Olifants River Mountains—which is just possible but highly improbable—we must take it that heavily spotted underparts are a normal feature of southern and western birds.

*L. l. centralis* was described by Roberts (1932) as having the underparts of the body pale yellow (though in 1940 he calls it 'clearer white below'). There is certainly a yellow tinge, of very variable depth, in all the birds I have seen from within the given range of *centralis*; but it can be matched by many birds from further south—skins from Pearston and Beaufort West, for example, are rather yellower than the average of South-West African and Bechuanaland birds.

Both Roberts and Vincent consider Eastern Cape birds to be *affinis* Shelley, described from Weenen, Natal. The characters given by Shelley are, as Sclater (1924) pointed out, those of a young bird; but in reviving the name, Roberts substituted lesser or absent striping on the flanks and smaller size than *L. l. leucomelas* or *L. l. namaqua*. He gives no diagnosis of the differences between *affinis* and *centralis*. I have seen only one Natal bird, from Colenso, and it is yellow below, almost as deep as Swaziland birds, but it can be matched by specimens from further south. The size given by Roberts for the two subspecies (*centralis* and *affinis*) is virtually identical.

*L. l. nkatiensis* (Roberts) is described as 'silky and whiter below' than *centralis* and much smaller. But Roberts appears to have had only one skin, a female—and he gives the measurements of male *centralis* for comparison. A series of five Bechuanaland skins, four of them topotypical for *nkatiensis*, in the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia have wings 78–83 mm., the range Roberts gives for *centralis*. I am unable to perceive the whiter underparts which Roberts gives as the other characteristic of this race—indeed, as compared with a series from South-West Africa and the northern Cape, Bechuanaland birds appear to me to be slightly greyer, but it is not of a degree which would allow of certain separation of individual skins.

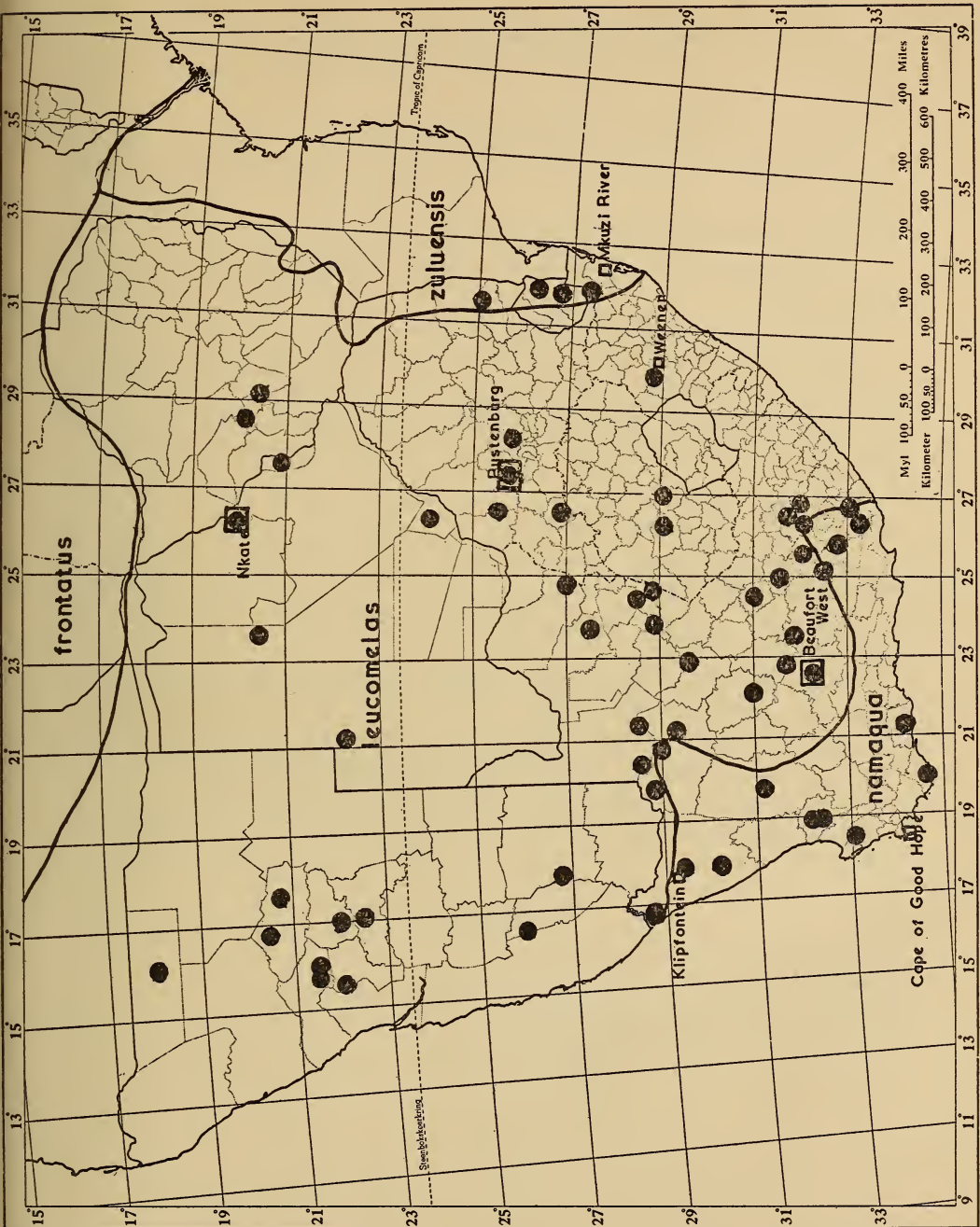
I am therefore of the opinion that only one subspecies of this Barbet is recognizable from the whole of this area, and the next problem is to decide what name to apply. If Boddaert's bird came from what is today called the Cape of Good Hope, then we must call the western and southern birds *leucomelas*, with *namaqua* a synonym, and the population east and north of this *affinis* Shelley, which is the next available name. There is, however, no certainty that Boddaert's bird did come from the Cape itself and a considerable balance of probability that it did not; for if it did, as we have seen, it would probably have been spotted below. Most of the other South African birds described by Boddaert ex Daubenton as from the 'Cape of Good Hope' are inconclusive on this point, but one of them, *Euplectes progne*, is decisive that some, at least, of them came from further north and east. I therefore propose to amend the type locality of *Lybius leucomelas* from the Cape of Good Hope to Beaufort West, Cape Province. This enables us to retain *namaqua* for the coastal birds and *leucomelas* for the bulk of the population, that inland of the range of *namaqua*.

*L. l. zuluensis* (Roberts) is described as yellower below, and smaller, than *affinis*. The yellow tinge below is clear in a series but not 100 per cent evident in individuals; the smaller size seems constant. I therefore recognize this race.

The subspecies of *Lybius leucomelas* within South African limits thus become:

1. *Lybius leucomelas leucomelas* (Bodd.)

*Bucco leucomelas* Boddaert, *Tabl. Pl. Enlum.*, 1783: 43—Cape of Good Hope; amended herein to Beaufort West, Cape Province.



APPROXIMATE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RACES OF *Lybius leucomelas* (Boddaert)

Each dot represents a locality from which one or more specimens has been examined. Type localities of described races are named and indicated by an open square.

Synonyms: *Pogonorhynchus affinis* Shelley, *Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 44, 1879: 680—Weenen; *Notopogonius leucomelas centralis* Roberts, *Ann. Tvl. Mus.*, 15, 1932: 26—Rustenburg; and *Notopogonius leucomelas nkatiensis* Roberts, *Ann. Tvl. Mus.*, 15, 1932: 27—Nkate.

White or yellowish white below, without spots.

Range: The whole of southern Africa except the south-western and eastern coastal strips.

2. *Lybius leucomelas namaqua* (W. L. Sclater)

*Tricholaema leucomelan namaqua* W. L. Sclater, *Bull. B.O.C.*, 42, 1922: 63—Klipfontein.

Heavily spotted black on whitish below.

Range: The western Cape Province from Little Namaqualand inland to south-western Kenhardt and to Calvinia; and east along the coastal low country to Cradock, Tarkastad and Albany. Intermediates between this and the nominate form are found at Grootderm (Orange River mouth), Deelfontein and Albany.

3. *Lybius leucomelas zuluensis* (Roberts)

*Notopogonius leucomelas zuluensis* Roberts, *Ann. Tvl. Mus.*, 14, 1931: 240—Mkuzi River, Zululand.

Synonym: *Notopogonius leucomelas tongensis* Roberts, *Ann. Tvl. Mus.*, 15, 1932: 26—Mkuzi River.

Yellowish below, without spots. Smaller than the other two races (wing, 73–83 mm., as against 78–87 mm.).

Range: Northern Zululand, the Lowveld of Swaziland and the Transvaal, Portuguese East Africa and the Sabi Valley of Southern Rhodesia.

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